

Sunday, September 18, 2011
4:37 PM

Notes on Fursenko and Naftali, One Hell of a Gamble

211: Sov generals seemed to think that they could use tac nucs to “complicate” a US landing on Cuba, without war expanding to two-sided nuclear exchange or all-out war! (also, 207)

[As a deterrent, this could have worked; but K made no effort to use it as a deterrent, by revealing it! When did he propose to do this, if ever?! But as a war-fighting device...Jesus Christ!

212: Ministry of Defense drafted an order delegating decision to Pliyev to use tac nucs “in the event that communications to Moscow were cut and a US-led invasion had begun. The order required two signatures. Malinovsky’s deputy, Marsh Zakharov signed in his capacity as army chief of staff, but Malinovsky did not....Khrushchev did not want to lose control over the decision to use nuclear weapons. The document was to sit unsigned in the files until events in Cuba warranted a change.” [SO—NO DELEGATION?] [NO: Gribkov explains that Malinovsky simply didn’t want to put this in writing; the oral delegation from K remained in force, until Oct. 22.]
Sept. 7—K signs off on order to send nuc warheads.

Each side tries to deter the other: without success. On the contrary, the US “deterrent” warnings lead to **speeding up** the process, to present US with a fait accompli before and after the November election. (211): Clearly, K hoped (as I inferred) that JFK would not take action before November 5 (when the deployments would be complete: the IRBM missiles would have arrived), given his not announcing the deployments before the elections. (Didn’t he notice that Keating was already announcing leaks of arrival of SU bases, August 31, and that JFK had committed himself on Sept. 4? So K WAS “making trouble” for JFK before the election; a leak to Keating was likely...) [Crazy expectation by K in May-September, then crazy response in September—unless he had taken other steps to deter...which were available, but he didn’t use them!]

C-I had just proved impossible for US to hide, as a covert op. Now SU was deploying missiles to Cuba as a covert op! (With a good deal of success! More than JFK in C-I. Not unlike Barbarossa: JFK’s advisors just couldn’t believe K would “be a fool.”) K cancels sub deployment and base because it would be more difficult to hide.

214 Did US ever consider that SU diesel subs would carry a nuclear-tipped torpedo? (Four of them had one each).

Assass was too “sensitive” in 1962 for the Special Group to discuss! McCone had moral objections! 201

Deterrence:

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My K/T pattern, choice of gamble to avert an otherwise certain short-run humiliation.

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(Had K ever considered such a deal, as outcome of Anadyr? Or was he really focused on Berlin?)

When K thought invasion was likely and imminent—Friday night, Saturday night—he was ready to settle simply for a no-invasion pledge (basically, since Wednesday, if he couldn't do better). ExComm was wrong to think, Saturday morning, after the Oct. 27 (demand for Turkey) that he would not settle for just a no-invasion pledge. (As he basically did; the secret deal on Turkey might have been "welcome" (Fursenko) but it did very little for K: it meant he had lost, not won; it didn't save his job; and he couldn't even afford to let Castro know he had "won" it, the secret deal).

When he thought invasion was not imminent—Saturday morning, for him—he wanted to look around and see if he could do better. That was the first time—Oct. 27—he had brought up the possibility of a Turkey deal at the Presidium: a "win," snatching victory from jaws of defeat. But after hearing of the Dobrynin talk with Bobby, and Castro's pressure to preempt, etc., he went back to the no-invasion pledge as the deal.

The secret Turkey pledge was part of this, but I strongly feel that it was not necessary to K's decision and played **no** role in his decision to move by the next morning in Cuba/DC. He had strong reason to fear an air strike on Sunday, followed by invasion; that was more than sufficient by then (since Wednesday) to cause him to accept JFK's Saturday proposal of a no-invasion pledge as the public deal. The Turkish offer (though the ExComm thought it would be minimally **necessary** to get a deal) was not necessary at all and played no role Sunday noon (Moscow time).

Yes, it shows that JFK was more willing to be “flexible” and make concessions than he was perceived at the time or for years afterward. In fact, he was a lot more flexible than that; he was determined to avoid an air strike or invasion (fearing a move on Berlin or Turkey—wrongly, unnecessarily—and also a local decision to fire the MRBMs (a valid fear) and he was prepared to concede even an open trade rather than do that. But he had made threats—thinking them safe, in view of his own bottom line, his own determination not to invade or launch an “unprovoked” airstrike—of responding to violent “**provocation**,” which would have been very hard for him to back off from (a second time!)—except literally at risk of impeachment, certainly of loss of seats in Congress, prestige, and reelection.

(See his Sept. 4 threat about “offensive weapons” (and Soviet combat troops: he didn’t even know yet that that had been defied): which he himself, along with McNamara and Sorensen, said he wouldn’t have made if he had thought it might be triggered.)

But it wasn’t needed—given his threats and the plausibility of his preparations for invasion and the rumors K was getting, and Castro’s being out of control (and perhaps Soviet commanders!) (and the willingness of the Presidium to see tac nucs used against an invasion force)—and actually played no role. (It would have if he had acted on his instincts Saturday morning and, against the criticism of his advisors, accepted the Saturday morning proposal, as he was willing to do (**and had probably suggested it to the Soviets: Dobrynin says (Bernstein) that Bobby did this Friday night. (Not in Fursenko). (Why would he have done it in the face of the Oct. 26 letter, Friday? Had Bobby seen this when he talked to Dobrynin, if he did Friday night?)**)

JFK was being pressed—even as late as Sunday, Oct. 28, by LeMay—to attack the missiles as the only way to get them out “before they became operational, with warheads” and the door would be shut on attacking them. (!) Actually, most had become operational by Oct. 22, the day of the speech. If this was a determinative risk, then the door was probably shut by Saturday, while they were still debating the airstrike, or Sunday, when the JCS argued for it. Did LeMay and the JCS really discount this risk altogether? Were they really ready to see Miami, or DC, go?!

But that’s why JFK didn’t have an excuse for making the blockade a long period (as he seemed to warn in his speech) and prolonged negotiations. Everyone accepted the need to “stop the construction of the bases” (the IRBM sites were not yet ready), and they were still uncertain about the warheads. (Actually, they were all there. **Why did not K announce this?** (Castro asked, “Why do the Soviets insist on denying the existence of the missiles?” 269. He asked Alekseev, Friday, Oct. 26 (before K’s letter?: K seemed to think it was a concession, a necessary one, to admit this in his letter. Castro saw this as a failure to use deterrence, to show Soviet commitment to Cuba, and to show it was a superpower crisis, not just a US/Cuban confrontation. (He wanted K to say that missiles were under Soviet control. I think K did say this that night: not before? But that was less deterrent than to say that Cuban AA was not under his control, and the tac nucs would be under local soviet control. Once again in the nuclear era, a superpower whose forces were “surrounded and potentially overwhelmed” (like ours in Berlin, or our allies in Dienbienphu or on the Offshore Islands, possibly in Korea) relies on threats of first-use

(which were not bluffs! K and the whole Presidium were actually willing to see the Soviet troops on Cuba “defended” with these! Literally suicidal (and worse)! **This Soviet plan—to use tac nucs on the invasion force at sea and on the beaches—was not more prudent, less suicidal (for the Soviets on Cuba, and really, for the SU and world!) than Castro’s “crazy” proposal for Soviet preemption in case of the invasion of Cuba. Both, a combination of Masada and Samson options! The trigger to the Doomsday Machine was in the hands of Cuban anti-aircraft gunners and of the local commander of Soviet ground troops in Cuba.**

(K could not openly admit, I suppose, that McNamara’s worry about unauthorized action under attack was soundly based; his deployment of the missiles would then look all the more irresponsible. We—even Gilpatric—talked about deliberate FU from a position of great superiority (though that wouldn’t make it rational). K hadn’t been doing that, since Gilpatric (though he did say, “you can’t swat our ass” any more: i.e., they had retaliatory capability. (Not much! Except against Europe, which he didn’t press; maybe because it would look like a threat against hostages, and hurt him with Europeans.)

JFK’s determination not to strike or invade (and to keep US actions under his personal control: see McNamara to Anderson) was not sufficient to keep nuclear war from occurring, and was not the cause of its not exploding on Sunday, October 28 or Monday. Nor was his willingness to make not only a secret trade of the Turkish missiles but an open trade (with great damage to NATO cohesion, and a political disaster for JFK and the Democrats). Despite all these, the crisis was about to explode as of Sunday morning, Oct. 28, if Khrushchev—precisely to avert that, which he correctly foresaw (on the basis of knowledge that JFK lacked, and most American participants and scholars lacked for twenty-five years and more—conceded to Kennedy’s terms of Oct. 27 (and the RFK ultimatums of that night. In their ignorance both of these secret Soviet considerations and of Khrushchev’s basic readiness to dismantle the missiles as of Thursday, Oct. 25 (Wednesday in Moscow)—“only not just yet, so long as American invasion is not imminent”—no American had thought it likely that he would do so. And they have either been perplexed ever since or have argued for explanations of his action that are mistaken.

The threat of invasion and apparent readiness to carry it out were indeed critical; but an ultimatum of invasion Tuesday (airstrike Monday) was not quite enough in itself, I believe, to get Khrushchev to drop the demand for the Turkish missiles on Sunday morning, rather than waiting until that evening to see if JFK would come around. He had good reason to hope that JFK would do so; and he would have been rewarded! JFK **was** ready to do so, and almost surely would have done so, giving K a win: **if no US airplane had been shot down, meanwhile, during Sunday.** If Khrushchev had had Castro under control and had known it—if he had felt sure that Castro’s gunners would not be firing Sunday morning—there was no reason for him not to wait a matter of hours to try to get a Turkish open deal (as Dobrynin tried to do on Oct. 28, even after K had accepted the secret deal!). Unless (which is possible) RFK’s talk had persuaded him that JFK would not bend on this: i.e., unless JFK’s actual **bluff** on this Saturday night had worked perfectly. That it was a bluff, without question (claiming that there was no chance he would accept an open deal) is demonstrated conclusively by the JFK/Rusk/Cordier

proposal. (Who knew of this besides Rusk and Cordier? McNamara? No. Bundy? NO. RFK: probably not, given a disagreement between JFK and RFK in the ExComm on that day, Saturday, about a deal on Turkey. Kenny O'Donnell?!)

Friday night: it looked like we'd won (as I expected). (When was my exchange with Dillon? "We've got to give them something. What are we offering them?" "We're offering them not to destroy their god damn missiles!" Dillon snorted, made a face, jerked his head away from me.

Saturday morning: the new message; (was it at a meeting that day that the above exchange took place?) I still thought a deal was unnecessary; in effect, I thought K would come around, if we held firm. No encouragement came from NATO for a deal (unless from the British, and apparently, the Norwegians and Danes; did they all prefer a US invasion? Thanks a lot! All "infantile egomaniacs," in the words of Nicole Kidman in Days of Thunder, about the illusion of immortality, invulnerability, control. They all would have gone! With their populations... (Thanks to the Presidium's willingness—not just Castro—to defend the beaches with the tactical nuclear weapons they had sent. Did they accept **any** responsibility, when they deposed Khrushchev in October 14, 1964, for their having gone along with his reckless, harebrained scheme in 1962.

What if the Soviets had leaked the secret deal? (Which RFK warned Dob. not to do). "It would have been off." And then what? Well, actually, K would have wanted to go ahead and dismantle the missiles anyway. But Castro would have been even more furious. And the Americans didn't know that K was that willing to settle. Would there have been any inspection allowed? Would the Il-28s have gone? Might Castro have continued to fire at American recon planes?! Could JFK have even given a no-invasion pledge, to get the missiles out, without an invasion?

All this American pressure for an invasion was in ignorance of the nuclear warheads and the tac nucs and the SU willingness to use the latter against invasion (if not the former, as Castro wanted!) (Or worse than ignorance, in the case of the JCS: apparent insouciance, insanity.) (K did say, in his Oct. 27 letter, that the missiles were not to be used unless there was an attack on Cuba, or the SU or its allies! Type II deterrence, a Soviet umbrella not only over Cuba! Part of the SU FS threat! Oi gevalt! (Like our Turkish missiles: not just, or mainly, for defense of Turkey!)

What if K had turned over the MRBMs to Cuban operational control and ownership, like our Turkish IRBMs: "SU keeps ownership and 'control' of the warheads." (We didn't keep 10,000 combat troops in Turkey!)

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But that’s why JFK didn’t have an excuse for making the blockade a long period (as he seemed to warn in his speech) and prolonged negotiations. Everyone accepted the need to “stop the construction of the bases” (the IRBM sites were not yet ready), and they were still uncertain about the warheads. (Actually, they were all there. **Why did not K announce this?** (Castro asked, “Why do the Soviets insist on denying the existence of the missiles?” 269. He asked Alekseev, Friday, Oct. 26 (before K’s letter?: K seemed to think it was a concession, a necessary one, to admit this in his letter. Castro saw this as a failure to use deterrence, to show Soviet commitment to Cuba, and to show it was a superpower crisis, not just a US/Cuban confrontation. (He wanted K to say that missiles were under Soviet control. I think K did say this that night: not before? But that was less deterrent than to say that Cuban AA was not under his control, and the tac nucs would be under local soviet control. Once again in the nuclear era, a superpower whose forces were “surrounded and potentially overwhelmed” (like ours in Berlin, or our allies in Dienbienphu or on the Offshore Islands, possibly in Korea) relies on threats of first-use

(which were not bluffs! K and the whole Presidium were actually willing to see the Soviet troops on Cuba "defended" with these! Literally suicidal (and worse)! **This Soviet plan—to use tac nucs on the invasion force at sea and on the beaches—was not more prudent, less suicidal (for the Soviets on Cuba, and really, for the SU and world!) than Castro's "crazy" proposal for Soviet preemption in case of the invasion of Cuba. Both, a combination of Masada and Samson options! The trigger to the Doomsday Machine was in the hands of Cuban anti-aircraft gunners and of the local commander of Soviet ground troops in Cuba.**

(K could not openly admit, I suppose, that McNamara's worry about unauthorized action under attack was soundly based; his deployment of the missiles would then look all the more irresponsible. We—even Gilpatric—talked about deliberate FU from a position of great superiority (though that wouldn't make it rational). K hadn't been doing that, since Gilpatric (though he did say, "you can't swat our ass" any more: i.e., they had retaliatory capability. (Not much! Except against Europe, which he didn't press; maybe because it would look like a threat against hostages, and hurt him with Europeans.)

unless JFK's determination not to strike or invade (and to keep US actions under his personal control: see McNamara to Anderson) was not sufficient to keep nuclear war from occurring, and was not the cause of its not exploding on Sunday, October 28 or Monday. Nor was his willingness to make not only a secret trade of the Turkish missiles but an open trade (with great damage to NATO cohesion, and a political disaster for JFK and the Democrats). Despite all these, the crisis was about to explode as of Sunday morning, Oct. 28, if Khrushchev—precisely to avert that, which he correctly foresaw (on the basis of knowledge that JFK lacked, and most American participants and scholars lacked for twenty-five years and more—conceded to Kennedy's terms of Oct. 27 (and the RFK ultimatums of that night. In their ignorance both of these secret Soviet considerations and of Khrushchev's basic readiness to dismantle the missiles as of Thursday, Oct. 25 (Wednesday in Moscow)—"only not just yet, so long as American invasion is not imminent"—no American had thought it likely that he would do so. And they have either been perplexed ever since or have argued for explanations of his action that are mistaken.

5 PM in Moscow
or afternoon
The threat of invasion and apparent readiness to carry it out were indeed critical; but an ultimatum of invasion Tuesday (airstrike Monday) was not quite enough in itself, I believe, to get Khrushchev to drop the demand for the Turkish missiles on Sunday morning, rather than waiting until that evening to see if JFK would come around. He had good reason to hope that JFK would do so; and he would have been rewarded! JFK was ready to do so, and almost surely would have done so, giving K a win: **if no US airplane had been shot down, meanwhile, during Sunday.** If Khrushchev had had Castro under control and had known it—if he had felt sure that Castro's gunners would not be firing Sunday morning—there was no reason for him not to wait a matter of hours to try to get a Turkish open deal (as Dobrynin tried to do on Oct. 28, even after K had accepted the secret deal!). Unless (which is possible) RFK's talk had persuaded him that JFK would not bend on this: i.e., unless JFK's actual **bluff** on this Saturday night had worked perfectly. That it was a bluff, without question (claiming that there was no chance he would accept an open deal) is demonstrated conclusively by the JFK/Rusk/Cordier

proposal. (Who knew of this besides Rusk and Cordier? McNamara? No. Bundy? NO. RFK: probably not, given a disagreement between JFK and RFK in the ExComm on that day, Saturday, about a deal on Turkey. Kenny O'Donnell?!)

Friday night: it looked like we'd won (as I expected). (When was my exchange with Dillon? "We've got to give them something. What are we offering them?" "We're offering them not to destroy their god damn missiles!" Dillon snorted, made a face, jerked his head away from me.

Saturday morning: the new message; (was it at a meeting that day that the above exchange took place?) I still thought a deal was unnecessary; in effect, I thought K would come around, if we held firm. No encouragement came from NATO for a deal (unless from the British, and apparently, the Norwegians and Danes; did they all prefer a US invasion? Thanks a lot! All "infantile egomaniacs," in the words of Nicole Kidman in *Days of Thunder*, about the illusion of immortality, invulnerability, control. They all would have gone! With their populations... (Thanks to the Presidium's willingness—not just Castro—to defend the beaches with the tactical nuclear weapons they had sent. Did they accept **any** responsibility, when they deposed Khrushchev in October 14, 1964, for their having gone along with his reckless, harebrained scheme in 1962.

What if the Soviets had leaked the secret deal? (Which RFK warned Dob. not to do). "It would have been off." And then what? Well, actually, K would have wanted to go ahead and dismantle the missiles anyway. But Castro would have been even more furious. And the Americans didn't know that K was that willing to settle. Would there have been any inspection allowed? Would the Il-28s have gone? Might Castro have continued to fire at American recon planes?! Could JFK have even given a no-invasion pledge, to get the missiles out, without an invasion?

All this American pressure for an invasion was in ignorance of the nuclear warheads and the tac nucs and the SU willingness to use the latter against invasion (if not the former, as Castro wanted!) (Or worse than ignorance, in the case of the JCS: apparent insouciance, insanity.) (K did say, in his Oct. 27 letter, that the missiles were not to be used unless there was an attack on Cuba, or the SU or its allies! Type II deterrence, a Soviet umbrella not only over Cuba! Part of the SU FS threat! Oi gevalt! (Like our Turkish missiles: not just, or mainly, for defense of Turkey!)

What if K had turned over the MRBMs to Cuban operational control and ownership, like our Turkish IRBMs: "SU keeps ownership and 'control' of the warheads." (We didn't keep 10,000 combat troops in Turkey!)